

The Blue Economy



Serial entrepreneur Gunter Pauli (pictured) believes too many green efforts by businesses to mitigate their impact on the environment are ethically insufficient: polluting less is still polluting, just like stealing less is still stealing. He came up with what he calls the Blue Economy, to stop doing less bad and start doing more good. He founded ZERI (Zero Emissions Research and Initiatives), a global network of creative minds to come up with innovative solutions to the world's problems, all inspired by nature. Many are shared in his book, *The Blue Economy: 100 innovations, 10 years, 100 million jobs*. Here we highlight one case that captures the holistic nature of his vision. It starts with a cup of coffee.

Farming mushrooms on coffee is more energy efficient, and mushrooms sprout within 3 months after seeding as opposed to 9 months on natural hardwood.



Leftovers after harvesting are enriched with amino acids and other nutrients from the process of being grown in coffee biomass. These leftovers can be fed to animals.



The more people eat mushrooms and consume less meat, the less land needs to be cleared for raising livestock.



The fewer animals, the less waste and methane gas.



The less methane gas, the less global warming.



The cellulose-waste business model, of which the coffee-mushroom one is a popular example, can become a new brand, where waste becomes a source of value creation.

4 guiding principles of the Blue Economy

- 1 Be inspired by nature**
As in nature, think in terms of the entire ecosystem and its capacity to regenerate.
- 2 Change the rules**
Rather than zero-sum games, consider a system in which the commons are truly common (and therefore free) and where everyone is given a chance.
- 3 Focus locally**
Create value locally for reuse primarily locally, recirculating money locally and empowering local human resources, where everything and everyone is valuable.
- 4 Embrace change**
Build resilient systems that have the capacity to evolve.

Harvesting, processing, roasting and brewing coffee generates 99% biomass waste.

Biomass waste emits millions of tons of methane gas.



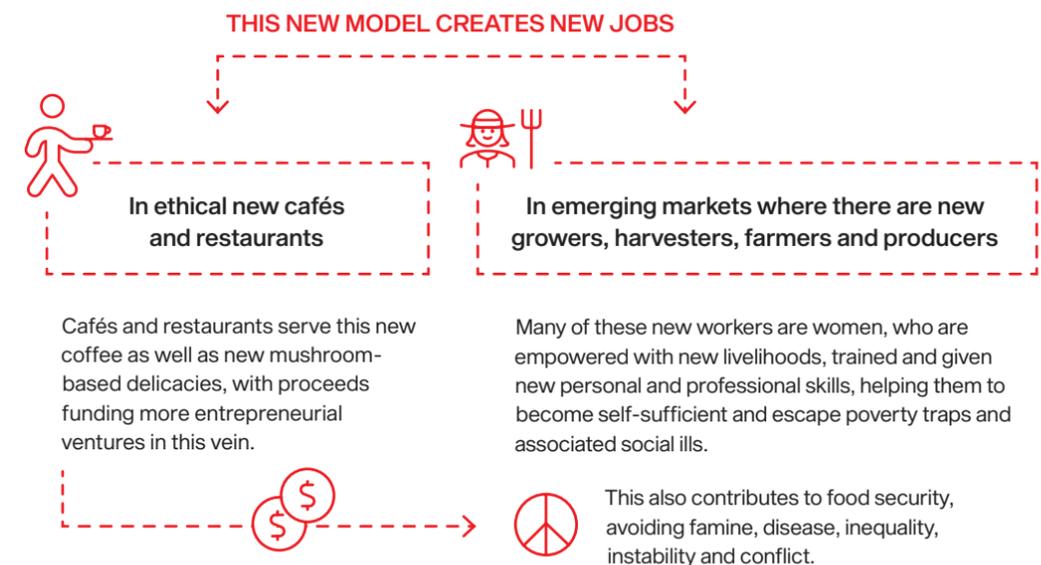
Methane gas contributes to global warming and climate change.



Demand for mushrooms, especially Asian varieties like shiitake, is growing as consumer tastes and diets, particularly in the West, change in favor of healthier, vegetarian options.



Many green efforts go as far as here – recycling waste, changing consumption habits – but that is only tackling part of the problem. The Blue Economy wants to scale up solutions at the global, not just personal, level.



Does it work?



The business model described here is already being employed around the world in various ways, for example:

- **GRO:** www.gro-together.com/en
- **Equator Coffees:** www.equatorcoffees.com
- **Back to the Roots (BTTR):** www.backtotheroots.com

If this works for coffee and mushrooms, why not tea and apple orchards, or any number of other things? Go to www.theblueeconomy.org and discover 100+ other cases of breakthrough business models that bring competitive products and services to market while simultaneously building social capital and enhancing mindful living in harmony with nature. And if you would like to explore ways to put the Blue Economy philosophy into action, contact their think-and-do tank at info@theblueeconomy.org.

A case study on The Blue Economy (SM-1693-E) by IESE's Mike Rosenberg and Jean-Baptiste de Harenne is available from www.iesepublishing.com.

Gunter Pauli spoke on "Building the Blue Economy" with Mike Rosenberg during the 2021 IESE Global Alumni Reunion in Madrid.